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Birley, A.R. 2005. *The Roman Government of Britain*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. xiii, 532 p. Pr. £ 80.

In 1981, A.R. Birley published his book *The Fasti of Roman Britain (FRB)*, in which he listed all the known administrators of Britannia between AD 43 and c. 409 and dealt with their background. About twenty-five years later, recent discoveries of new officials called for an update of the information published in the *FRB*. Birley states in the preface of *The Roman Government of Britain* that his initial idea was to publish these updates in the form of addenda to his *FRB* (p. vi). However, his awareness that many entries on previously recorded officials also needed revision due to the fact that more is now known about their dates, careers, or origin, made that he decided to present a completely revised edition of the *FRB*.

*The Roman Government of Britain* is divided into four sections of unequal length. The first section covers by far the largest part, almost two thirds of the book (pp. 3-329). In this part, Birley examines in detail the careers of all the men, senatorial and equestrian, who contributed or may have contributed to the government of Britain as an undivided Roman province, i.e. in the period AD 43 to c. 213. He starts with the senatorial administrators (part I.1-I.12). The description and analysis of the senatorial career under the principate, which formed a separate part in the *FRB*, is now reduced and incorporated into this part as I.1. Details on the governor's staff and on local government are added (I.1.2 and I.1.4). Next, Birley recounts the prosopographical details of and the most recent views on the senatorial administrators of Britain: first the governors (*legati Augusti pro praetore, praesides*) in chronological order (parts I.2 to I.7); then, the *comites* of the Emperors in Britain (I.8); next, the commanders of the legions based in Britannia (*legati legionis*) are dealt with (I.9 and I.10); then, the *iuridici* who were appointed to take over the judicial functions from the governor when he was too busy to deal with these (I.11); and finally the *tribuni laticlavii*, military tribunes of legions stationed in Britain (I.12). In I.13, Birley gives an account of the procuratorial career under the principate which is much shorter than the part on the senatorial career. This account is followed by a prosopographical overview of the equestrian procurators (I.14), commanders of the fleet (I.15) and some junior equestrian positions (I.16).

Each entry of this prosopographical overview starts with the full (known) name of the administrator, his filiation (if known), the date of his term of office, and the date of his consulship (if recorded) in bold type. Next, the relevant source material is cited, literary sources as well as inscriptions. Birley's choice to give Greek sources, except for the inscriptions, only in translation, while the Latin sources are all given in the original language as well as a translation, is mentioned in the preface (p. vi),

but not explained. In some cases, the quoted passages are rather long, revealing more about the chaotic military circumstances during the reign of an official than about the man himself. After dealing with the sources, all the known information about the man's career and background (geographical origin, descent, identity, status, contemporary family members, (possible) descendants) is given. Where possible, links between men who served in Britannia at about the same time are mentioned or suggested. How extensive the description of an administrator is, is highly dependent on how much is known or written about this man.

The second section deals with the period from Caracalla to Carinus, c. 213 to 285. Birley starts with giving the *status quaestionis* of the discussion on the first division of Britannia (II.1). He sums up the problems and the suggested solutions and concludes that, in his opinion, the division of Britannia into Britannia Superior and Britannia Inferior must have taken place somewhere at the beginning of the sole reign of Caracalla, and that Herodian must have been wrong in writing that Severus was the one who divided the province in 197. The remainder of Part II (II.2) is devoted to a list of the governors and legionary legates in the third century, using the same general pattern for each entry that Birley applied in the first part.

Section three, the shortest section, is about the usurpers Carausius (III.1) and Allectus (III.2), governing Britannia between 286 and 296, and the way the province was reconquered under Constantius (III.3).

Part IV about the last century of Roman rule in Britain deals with the second division of Britain and all the uncertainties attached to this (IV.1-2), the military command and civil administration in late Roman Britain (IV.3), and ends with a list of all the known high officials in Britannia from the tetrarchy to the early fifth century (IV.4). This list is given in chronological order as far as possible and at some points it is interrupted by a discussion of imperial involvement in Britain in this period. The increasing number of these insertions notably reflects the growing uncertainty and military chaos in the province during this last period.

Birley concludes his work with an appendix on British client-rulers, which with its three pages seems too brief to really add something (pp. 466-8), followed by a select bibliography (pp. 469-72), an extensive glossary of Latin terms, which is useful for those who are not familiar with the terminology of Roman administration (pp. 473-9), and indices (pp. 481-532).

The title *The Roman Government of Britain* might be slightly confusing, suggesting that this concerns an entirely new book instead of a revised edition of the *FRB*. Although I think revision of prosopographical information is necessary due to new findings, the question remains whether such a new book is justified. In some instances, Birley seems to have become a victim of his own knowledge, when he ends up in elaborate bibliographical descriptions (e.g. the exceptionally long

entry on Agricola, pp. 71-95) and detailed information about matters which have little to do with British government (e.g. a digression on the kind of stone which was used for Severus' urn on p. 202). Rather than calling this book a handbook of Britain under Roman rule, as Birley himself calls it in his preface (p. vii), I would consider this work a prosopographical manual about Roman Britain with historical addenda and digressions. However, this work is an excellent addition to the recently published surveys on Britannia, essential for anyone who is interested in Roman Britain.

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